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WORLD CONFERENCE AGAINST RACISM,
RACIAL DISCRIMINATION, XENOPHOBIA
AND RELATED INTOLERANCE

Durban, 31 August - 7 September 2001
Item 9 of the provisional agenda

CONFERENCE THEMES

NGO contributions

Contribution* submitted by Fraternité Notre Dame

The secretariat has received the following written statement, which is transmitted to the World Conference.

* This contribution is issued, unedited, as received from the submitting non-governmental organization.

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ENG

Mr. President,

As Superior General of ***Fraternite Notre Dame***, I am glad to have the opportunity to share my thoughts with this Conference, and I thank you, Mr. President, for the time you grant me.

The cause of racial discrimination and discrimination in general is a matter dear to my heart, because it is the carrier of an incalculable number of sufferings and humiliations inflicted most of the time, upon the poorest and the most destitute.

One can say that discrimination is prerogative of hatred and ferment of war, over centuries. Our earth is literraly "torn apart". Our earth "bleeds" because of the heaviness of misunderstandings and intolerance. For the time being, the cry of these rejected ones, merely because of their race, their class or their creed, goes right up to heaven.

Everywhere we can see people against people, ethnic group against ethnic group, tribe against tribe, religion against religion.

Rejection of minorities, sectarianism and discrimination are inflicted to hundreds of thousands of men and women who, in fact, by the mere right to freedom, have barely a right to survive.

The devastating effects of racial or ethnic discrimination are felt at far as the farthest parts on earth. What country boast of being totally exempt from it ??

However, racism, xenophobia, rejection of foreigners are notions that should not be debated; They are so evident, that they are contrary to human rights.

So many times, human history has shown us tragedies engendered by racism and xenophobia. The 20th century has carried down these intolerances far too long. We bear the concept of "apartheid", like a cloak of shame, a past that we are not proud of.

If some progress has been made in this area, for a few years, and especially here in South Africa, then, we have to accept that there is still much left to do. And we should be sad to still see this triumph, under the pretext of racial or religious, difference, hatred of minorities and oppression of the "small ones".

As a religious man, at the head of an international humanitarian organization, let me tell you that at ***Fraternite Notre Dame***, we "bang our proverbial head against the wall", in relation to the problem of racism, particularly in the missions of emergency relief, where we intervene. I am thinking about Rwanda, ex-Yugoslavia, Kosovo... etc...

Fratricidal war, hatred and bloodshed, tools of the devil are coming at us from all sides. Seditions are fomented, against the weak. One shoves aside the foreigner, one shoves aside another, who does not think like a certain "majority" has decided.

And, what can we say, alas, about France? Its borders are maybe open, but her heart is cold. The "welcome" of our forefathers gave way to a fierce rejection of foreigners.

Concerning that matter, I would like to talk to you about the critical subject and delicate maner of religious discrimination. For we have to admit that in many countries, and especially in Europe, in France, religious freedom is not put into practice... far from it.

A wind of persecution has swooped down over us for several years, on the minorities, on the young Congregations. This partial judgement qualifies everything as a "sect". When one is not part of the religious institutions and belonging to the "majority", one can become suspicious, since the stamp of prejudices and misinformation is affixed to all of one's actions. Suddenly one becomes questionable in everything, even if one's intentions are right, even if one's work is only to help the poorest and to relieve the infortunate ones, we can see that this situation is worsening and this is very painful for us. I know that this injustice makes others also feel pain; to those "just" men who, men like you, Mr. President, have their heart set on defending the Human Rights, to assure freedom and justice for all.

Every religious organization has to be able to act and progress freely without hindrance since its actions attempt to serve the interests of the "public good". Racism and rejection of our "fellow man" must not attack individuals, no more than it can attack religious groups. Why should we want to brush aside or brush off religious communities under the pretext that they do not think exactly like large institutions?

We wish very much for this anti-religious campaign -- which is a real, moral segregation - to cease. We suffer from this grievous intolerance that denounces everyone, that calls anything a "sect", just for the purpose of eliminating or "weeding out", in the name of "survival of the fittest" or "majority rule".

We wish for men's minds to quiet; for our minds to be open to diversity, for all to be able to work on the humanitarian, moral and spiritual levels in an atmosphere of equality. So that our future will be built on a solid base, and that tomorrow, the children of the world will be able to respect one another, to think, to act, to live in peace, without the fear of delation which always leads to persecution and sectarianism.